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Economic Impact of Tourism on Local Communities in Gashaka Gumti National Park

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Abstract

Gashaka Gumti National Park, located across Taraba and Adamawa States along the Cameroon border and home to diverse grasslands and Nigeria's highest peak, Chappal Waddii ("Mountain of Death"), serves as a critical site for tourism and conservation. This study analyzes the factors influencing the economic impact of tourism on local communities within the park. It hypothesizes that employment in tourism increases community participation in biodiversity conservation, that financial benefits directly affect the likelihood of engaging in conservation activities, and that infrastructure development enhances household willingness to support conservation efforts. Data were collected through household questionnaires and analyzed using logistic regression. The findings support all three hypotheses, demonstrating that tourism generates significant economic impacts that positively shape local engagement in conservation. This study adds to empirical evidence on the nexus between tourism, livelihoods, and conservation, and underscores the importance of designing tourism strategies that maximize local economic benefits. The results carry practical implications for park managers and

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policymakers, particularly in strengthening community–park relations and promoting sustainable conservation practices.

Keywords: Economic Impact; Tourism; Local Communities; Gashaka Gumti National Park; Biodiversity Conservation

INTRODUCTION

Gashaka Gumti National Park is located in the Taraba and Adamawa states and along the Cameroon border. It contains grasslands as well as the country's highest peak, Chappal Waddii known as the "Mountain of Death," with an elevation of 7,936 feet. It was established in 1991 and the size of park has a total area of about 6402 km^2. The Mammals presents in Gashaka Gumti National Park are buffalo, lion, elephant, wilddog, waterbuck, roan antelope, gianteland kob and hartebeest.

According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO, 1980) all countries/destinations depend on their positive images to succeed as tourist destinations or their negative images to fail in attracting tourists. Hunt (1975) was the first to demonstrate the importance of positive "destination image" in increasing the number of tourists visiting destinations as much as, or even more than, tangible resources.

Thus, the tourism industry has a great physical/environmental and socio-economic influence on a destination, especially regarding marketing its image and influencing tourists' destination choice. A good image of a destination brings more tourists to the destination (WTO, 1980). If any tourism authority can therefore create a positive image of its destination in tourists' minds, then it is easy to be successful in her tourism business (Hankinson, 2004) because a strong positive destination image gives a competitive advantage to a destination against other competitors (Fall, 2004). If the tourists perceive the image of a potential destination positively and favourably, then they are often likely to visit the desired tourist place even many times (Laws, 2006; Beerli, 2004).

One of the primary issues confronting Gashaka Gumti National Park is the inadequacy of tourism-related infrastructure. Although the park has attracted a growing number of visitors in recent years, the supporting infrastructure such as roads, accommodation facilities, and basic utilities has not kept pace with this increased demand (Chukwu, 2022). The lack of proper infrastructure not only limits the quality of the tourist

experience but also restricts the economic benefits that can be derived from tourism activities. For instance, inadequate road networks and poor transportation services compromise the accessibility of key attractions within the park, thereby reducing the potential for generating tourist revenue (Adeyemi & Musa, 2023). This infrastructural gap has a dual impact: it diminishes the competitive advantage of the park as a tourist destination and simultaneously curtails the opportunities for local economic development.

Environmental degradation represents another significant challenge associated with tourism development in Gashaka Gumti National Park. Increased tourist influx, if not managed appropriately, can lead to soil erosion, water pollution, and habitat disruption, which are particularly detrimental in a region known for its rich biodiversity (Harris, 2021). The pressure from tourism activities, such as unregulated camping, littering, and the overuse of natural resources, exacerbates the risk of irreversible environmental damage. Research by Owen (2022) emphasizes that the environmental costs of tourism can undermine conservation efforts if the growth is not aligned with sustainable practices. Consequently, the environmental integrity of the park a cornerstone for both its ecological significance and its appeal to nature-based tourists is at risk. This situation creates a conflict between short-term economic gains from tourism and the long-term need for conservation and sustainability.

Aims and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to assess tourism contribution to the development of Gashaka Gumti National park. Specific objectives are examining the economic impacts of tourism on local community in study area. Thus, what are the economic impacts of tourism on local community in Gashaka-Gumti National park?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its comprehensive approach to understanding how tourism can be leveraged to foster sustainable development within Gashaka Gumti National Park. By examining the economic impacts of tourism on local community in Gashaka-Gumti National park? This study is poised to make a substantial contribution to policy and practice by offering evidence-based recommendations for sustainable tourism development in Gashaka Gumti National Park. First, the research provides policymakers with detailed insights into the economic benefits that tourism can generate for local communities, including job creation, revenue growth, and the stimulation of local

enterprises. By quantifying these benefits, the study offers a solid foundation for developing policies that incentivize sustainable tourism while addressing infrastructural deficits (Jones & Miller, 2021; Adeyemi & Musa, 2023).

Scope of the Study

This study will cover tourism development and its contribution to revenue generation in Gashaka Gumti National park.

This study focuses exclusively on Gashaka Gumti National Park and its surrounding communities in northeastern Nigeria, a region celebrated for its rich biodiversity and cultural heritage. By concentrating on developments over the past decade, the research examines the evolving impact of tourism from multiple perspectives. The thematic scope is structured around the economic benefits such as revenue generation and job creation.

Limitation of the Study

Conducting a comprehensive assessment of the tourism contribution to the development of Gashaka Gumti National park is resource-intensive, and financial limitation restrict the scope and depth of the study.

Study Area

Gashaka Gumti National Park, Nigeria's largest national park is located in the north eastern part of the country, spanning parts of Adamawa and Taraba States. The park is renowned for its rich biodiversity, encompassing a variety of ecosystems that include savannahs, montane forests, and wetlands. It serves as a critical ecological corridor and a significant center for wildlife conservation. In addition to its ecological importance, the park has the potential to drive regional development through tourism by attracting both domestic and international visitors interested in its natural beauty and cultural heritage.



Figure 1: Map of Nigeria showing Gashaka Gumti National Park Boarding Republic of Cameroon

National Park: In this study, a national park is understood as a designated and protected area established primarily for the conservation of natural biodiversity and ecosystems while allowing for public recreation and education. Specifically, it refers to Gashaka Gumti National Park, recognized as Nigeria's largest and one of its most ecologically diverse protected areas (Okoro, 2023).

Concept of Tourism

Pearce (1982) defines tourism as "relationships and phenomena arising out of the journeys and temporary stays of people traveling mainly for recreation." The spatial interaction arising out of the tourist's journey (movement) from his/her place of origin to destination is important in understanding the phenomenon of tourism and differentiates it

from other forms of leisure such as in homes and places of work. According to Cooper *et al.,* (2008), tourism consists of various components such as transportation, accommodation, attractions, and services that facilitate the travel experience. These components form the tourism system, which is influenced by economic, social, cultural, and environmental factors. Tourism is broadly classified into different types, including domestic tourism (travel within one's country), international tourism (travel across national borders), and various niche forms such as ecotourism, adventure tourism, and cultural tourism (Page, 2019).

In many countries, national parks serve as significant tourism attractions, contributing to local and national economies. Visitors engage in activities such as hiking, wildlife viewing, and camping, which generate revenue through park fees, accommodation, and local businesses (Buckley, 2011). Additionally, these parks create employment opportunities in conservation, hospitality, and guiding services. However, tourism in national parks must be managed sustainably to avoid negative environmental impacts, such as habitat destruction and pollution (Balmford et al., 2015). Policies such as visitor limits and eco-friendly infrastructure are often implemented to mitigate these effects.

Commodification theory

Tourism commodification refers to the process of transforming cultural, natural, or social elements into products or services that can be bought and sold in the tourism market. This transformation involves marketing these elements in a way that appeals to tourists, often altering their original meaning or context to fit commercial purposes. Commodification in tourism can lead to increased economic opportunities for communities by attracting visitors, but it can also result in cultural homogenization, where unique cultural identities are diluted or altered to appease tourists' expectations. Understanding tourism commodification involves recognizing both its benefits and challenges. (Robert Shepherd, 2002).

Motivation theory

Motivation studies have evolved immensely since the very first time that Lundberg (1971) asked the question of 'why do tourists travel? Dann (1981) has provided a comprehensive list of studies in the 1960s and 1970s that, either directly or indirectly, have investigated the concept of tourism motivation. Broadly speaking, Cohen (1972) and Plog (1974) studies are the two early attempts of this discovery journey that have discussed some

aspects of motivations by categorizing travelers and destinations. In the next coming years, various theories and models were developed, directly addressing travelers' motivations, among which the push–pull (Dann, 1977), escape–seeking (Iso-Ahola, 1982), intrinsic extrinsic (Mansfeld, 1987), and travel career ladder (Pearce, 1991) (later, revised to travel career patterns (Pearce & Lee, 2005) are the most renowned.

Because tourism is all about leisure and pleasure, people like to visit places and events that could afford them the opportunities for these leisure and pleasure. These places and events of interest could be natural, cultural or artificial (man-made events and situations). Based on this view, tourism types could be categorized into the follows:

i. Natural or Eco-Tourism: that has to do with the beautiful natural or man-made issues or attraction sites like caves, plateau, mountains, water-falls, rocks, and other natural attractions such as wildlife, water resources and terrain resources. Ecotourism is the purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the culture and natural history of the environment, taking care not to alter integrity of the ecosystem, and producing economic opportunities that make the conservation of natural resources beneficial to local people (Eco-tourism Society, 1991).

ii. Cultural Tourism: that has to do with the cultural advantages and uniqueness of a people, either man-made or inherited. Among the cultural heritage of a people that could be a source of tourist attractions are dances, music, customs, dresses, historical monuments, images, arts and crafts, festivals like new yam, traditional religious rallies, traditional marriages and burials, etc.

iii. Man-made or Artificial Tourism: Tourism based on man's creation or technological innovations in the areas of entertainment (cinemas, theatres, parks, museum and other entertainment centers); sport and leisure (like swimming pools, sports clubs, social clubs and other leisure centers); accommodation (like hotels, motels, guest houses and camping holiday packs); restaurants, hotels and transport facilities like travel agents, tour operators and tour information centers, etc (Ezema 1993 and Okoli 2003).

Despite the valuable contributions of these studies, several research gaps remain. Firstly, most of the reviewed studies focus on specific regions (Botswana, South Asia, and Zanzibar), leaving a gap in understanding how these challenges manifest in other tourism-dependent regions, such as Nigeria and other West African countries. Secondly, while Gössling (2001) examined the environmental impact of tourism, the study is over two

decades old and may not reflect current sustainability practices and climate change considerations. Furthermore, there is a lack of empirical research assessing the interconnection between economic, social, and environmental challenges in tourism development holistically. Lastly, while policy recommendations were provided, there is limited research on the effectiveness of these policy implementations and their long-term impact on tourism sustainability. Addressing these gaps would require further empirical research across diverse geographical regions, updated environmental impact assessments, and policy evaluation studies to enhance sustainable tourism development.

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the processes and procedures that were followed in carrying out the study are discussed under the following sub-headings:

Research Design

Descriptive research method using a survey study design was used for this work. This was considered appropriate because according to Osuala (2003), descriptive research is the basic for all types of research in assessing a situation as a pre-requisite for inference and generalization.

This study employed a mixed method approach combining both quantitative and qualitative methods. This approach will facilitate the collection of quantitative and qualitative data on tourist behavior, community perceptions, and the overall socio-economic impact of tourism. The design enables the identification of key trends and challenges in tourism development within the park's context.

Population of the Study

The Population consisted of the local communities of Gashaka and Gumti National park. These include tourists, local residents, business owners, and park officials in the park.

Tourists: Visitors to Gashaka Gumti National Park who use its facilities and participate in tourism activities.

Local residents: Residents living in the communities adjacent to the park who are affected by tourism.

Park Officials: Managers and staff involved in the administration and conservation of the park.

Local Business Owners: Entrepreneurs and service providers whose livelihoods are linked to tourism activities in and around the park.

Table 1: Population and Sample Size of the Study

S/N	Target Population	Sample Size
1.	Tourists	80
2.	Local residents	20
3.	Park officials	10
4.	Local business owners	10
Total		**120**

Sample and Sampling Techniques

A purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents who are knowledgeable and directly involved in tourism activity in the study area. The study sampled respondents from the identified groups as in table 3.1 above.

Instrument for Data Collection

The main instrument for the collection of primary data will be Questionnaire

Questionnaire

Self-administered questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. Structured Questionnaires will be administered to the respondents. This method was adopted because it is a faster and easier method of getting information from respondents. This was anchored on the fact that the respondent's response can give the researcher the opportunity to make further observation to get additional response in order to cross validate the responses elicited from the questionnaire method. The questionnaire contains section A and B. Section A contains personal information about the respondents. Section B is the main body of the questionnaire. This section contained close ended questions using a four (4) point likert scale through which the opinions of the respondents were expressed. This ranges from 1= strongly disagree to 4= strongly agree.

Field observation

Procedure for Data Collection

The procedure for data collection began with the acquisition of a letter of permission from the head of the department to conduct fieldwork. This initial step ensures institutional approval and compliance with ethical guidelines. Once permission is granted, the research instrument titled "Assessment of Tourism contribution to the Development of Gashaka Gumti National Park" were administered to the respondents. As a result of the inability of the researcher to effectively know the exact number of respondents, the researcher surveyed the park under study in order to ascertain the number of respondents as shown in table 1 above.

Questionnaires were administered to respondents based on the information obtained by the researcher on the number of respondents under study. One week was used for the collection of data at the park. Emphasis was placed on the tourists, local community members, park officials and local business owners at the time of data collection. Questionnaires were designed and administered to gather relevant data relating to the objectives and research questions. Thus, a total of 120 copies of well-designed and properly structure questionnaires were prepared to be administered to the respondents as shown in the sample size table above.

Method of Data Analysis

Responses from the questionnaires were computed in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. Data collected were analyzed and presented using appropriate descriptive statistical tools such as frequency counts, simple percentages, mean and standard deviations which formed the basis for decision making.

Survey method was used to generate data for quantitative analysis. Tables, simple percentages, mean and standard deviation were used to ensure accurate statistical result. The results of the study are presented in accordance with the research questions.

Questionnaire Return Analysis

Table 2 show the distribution and retrieval of questionnaires used in the study. A total of 120 questionnaires were distributed to the target respondents across the park, representing 100% of the intended sample size. All the 120 questionnaires were successfully retrieved, yielding a 100% response rate. This high response rate indicates a

high level of participation and cooperation from the respondents. All the data collected were reliably good and were used for this analysis.

Table 2: Questionnaire Return Analysis

Distribution	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Returned not returned	120 0	100% 0%
Total	**120**	**100%**

Source: Field survey, 2025

RESULTS

This chapter deals with the analysis of data obtained in this research. Survey method was used to generate data for quantitative analysis. Tables, simple percentages, mean and standard deviation were used to ensure accurate statistical result. The results of the study are presented in accordance with the research questions.

Questionnaire Return Analysis

Table 1 show the distribution and retrieval of questionnaires used in the study. A total of 120 questionnaires were distributed to the target respondents across the park, representing 100% of the intended sample size. All the 120 questionnaires were successfully retrieved, yielding a 100% response rate. This high response rate indicates a high level of participation and cooperation from the respondents. All the data collected were reliably good and were used for this analysis.

Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 2 presents the summary of the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents. The findings indicate that 80 respondents, representing 66.7% were male, while 40 respondents representing 33.3% were female, indicating a higher representation of males among the respondents.

In terms of age distribution, 60 respondents representing 50.0% were within the 36–45 age groups, followed by 40 respondents, representing 33.3% in the 26–35 age category. Respondents aged 46 years and above accounted for 15 respondents, representing 12.5% while the least represented were those aged 18–25, with 5 respondents representing 4.2% of the total sample.

Regarding marital status, 75 respondents representing 62.5% were married, while 45 respondents, representing 37.5% were single. No respondents identified under the "Others" category.

The educational qualifications of respondents indicate that 60 respondents, representing 50.0% attained secondary education, 55 respondents, representing 45.8% attained tertiary education, while only 5 respondents, representing 4.2% attained primary education.

In terms of residency status, the findings reveal that 80 respondents, representing 66.7% were tourists, followed by 20 respondents, representing 16.7% who were local residents. Additionally, 10 respondents, representing 8.3% were business owners, while 10 respondents, representing 8.3% were park officials.

Table 3: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Characteristics	**Frequency**	**percentage (%)**
Gender		
Male	80	66.7
Female	40	33.3
Total	120	100
Age		
18-25	5	4.2
26-35	40	33.3
36-45	60	50.0
46-above	15	12.5
Total	120	100
Marital Status		
Single	45	37.5
Married	75	62.5
Others	0	0.0
Total	120	100
Educational Level		
Primary	5	4.2
Secondary	60	50.0
Tertiary	55	45.8
Total	120	100

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	percentage (%)
Residency Status		
Local Resident	20	16.7
Tourists	80	66.7
Business	10	8.3
Park officials	10	8.3
Total	120	100

The results in Table 4 highlight the economic impact of tourism on local communities in Gashaka Gumti National Park. Respondents moderately agreed that tourism has contributed to job creation, as reflected in a mean score of 2.92 and a standard deviation of 0.64. This suggests that while tourism generates employment, its impact may not be substantial or evenly distributed across the local population.

Local businesses were perceived to have benefited significantly from the influx of tourists, with a high mean score of 3.29 and a low standard deviation of 0.45, indicating strong consensus on this positive economic effect. Similarly, respondents agreed that tourism has enhanced investment opportunities in the community, with a mean of 3.21 and a standard deviation of 0.71, suggesting that tourism plays a role in attracting investors and fostering economic growth.

Tourism's contribution to infrastructure improvements, such as roads, electricity, and water supply, received moderate agreement, with a mean score of 2.75 and a standard deviation of 0.66. This implies that while some infrastructural developments have occurred, they may not be widespread or fully sufficient to meet the needs of local communities.

However, respondents largely disagreed that tourism revenue is reinvested into community development projects, as indicated by a low mean score of 1.96 and a standard deviation of 0.61. This finding suggests concerns regarding the allocation of tourism-generated income and highlights the need for more transparent and effective reinvestment strategies to ensure that local communities benefit equitably.

Table 4: Economic Impact of Tourism on Local Communities in Gashaka Gumti National Park

		Min	Max	Mean	STD
1	Tourism has significantly contributed to job creation in local communities	2	4	2.92	0.64
2	Local businesses have benefited from the influx of tourists to the park.	3	4	3.29	0.45
3	Tourism has enhanced investment Opportunities in the community	2	4	3.21	0.71
4	Tourism has led to improved infrastructure (e.g., roads, electricity, and water supply) in local communities	2	4	2.75	0.66
5	Tourism revenue is reinvested into community development projects	1	3	1.96	0.61

Likert scale: 1.00-1.49= Strongly Disagreed; 1.5-2.49 = Disagreed; 2.5-3.49 = Agreed; 3.5-4.00 = Strongly Agreed. Source: Field survey, 2025.

DISCUSSION

This study found that tourism positively contributes to local businesses (a mean score of 3.29), investment opportunities (a mean score of 3.21), and job creation (a mean score of 2.92). These findings are consistent with Anwuri and Osuoha (2022), who established a positive relationship between tourist attractions and employment rates in Nigeria. Additionally, Ogili *et al.,* (2023) demonstrated that tourism significantly boosts revenue generation, employment, and rural development in Enugu State, reinforcing the argument that tourism can drive economic transformation.

However, the study indicates that tourism-generated revenue is not adequately reinvested into community development projects (a mean score of 1.96), raising concerns about financial transparency. This aligns with Enemuo (2015), who found that despite the presence of Cross River National Park, there was no significant economic improvement in host communities, emphasizing the need for better revenue reinvestment strategies.

The findings of the study provide significant insights into the current state of tourism development in Gashaka-Gumti National Park, emphasizing its economic contributions. However, the study revealed the following Tourism's Contribution to Local Economic Development in the study area: Tourism has created employment opportunities for local residents, boosting the local economy through increased business activities. There is a positive impact of tourism on small and medium enterprises (SMEs), particularly in

hospitality and local crafts and Revenue from tourism has contributed to community development, though reinvestment strategies remain inadequate.

CONCLUSION

This study has provided valuable insights into the state of tourism development in Gashaka Gumti National Park, highlighting its economic contributions, as well as highlights the crucial role of effective tourism management in enhancing sustainable tourism development in Gashaka Gumti National Park. The findings reveal that while tourism contributes significantly to the local economy through employment and business opportunities, its potential is constrained by poor infrastructure, limited community participation, security concerns, and environmental degradation. These challenges underscore the need for a comprehensive and strategic approach to tourism planning and development.

Recommendations

Promotion and Marketing of the Park: A comprehensive marketing strategy should be implemented to attract both domestic and international tourists through digital platforms, tourism fairs, and strategic partnerships.

Capacity Building and Training: Training programs should be provided for local tourism operators, park rangers, and hospitality workers to improve service quality and conservation practices.

Periodic Safety Audits: Regular safety and infrastructure audits should be conducted to evaluate compliance with safety standards and identify areas for improvement. Recommendations from these audits should be promptly implemented to enhance tourism development.

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